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English and Norse Dragons, Ancient and Modern

When Beowulf enters the Danish royal hall at Heorot after his triumph over the monster Grendel, his victory is celebrated by a poet who recites a lay which compares Beowulf's achievement to the victory of the traditional hero Sigemund, son of Wæls, over a *wrǣtliċne wyrm* ('glittering worm', *Beowulf* 891), as a result of which Siġemund was able to load his ship with treasure, while the dead worm melted in its own heat. The fictional poet is said to recall details of *ealdġeseġena* ('ancient narratives', 869) which other people did not know, in his own words and in properly metrical verse (*word ōþer fand* / *sōðe ġebunden*, 'he devised new words in proper metre', 870-871). This suggests that an orally performing poet was expected to hand on stories that were regarded as historically 'true', but to do so in his own words, adding new details and making the legend relevant to the contemporary situation of his audience. In this paper I will look at some of the ways in which such re-tellings have altered the legend of Sigmundr and Sigurðr, and at how their worm-slaying story has been adapted or imitated in more recent times.

The actual poet of *Beowulf* adapts the received legend to changed circumstances in at least two respects. His version, intended for a Christian audience, is more critical of Sigemund and Fitela than the implied view of the fictional pre-Christian poet. Their deeds together are referred to as *fǣhðe ond fyrena* 'feuding and crimes' (879); they are together *æt nīða ġehwām* 'in every act of malice' (882); the dragon dies *morðre* 'by murder, deadly sin or murderous attack' (892), and Sigemund himself is referred to as *āglǣca* 'a monstrous being' (893). The most recent edition of *Beowulf* does point out a few contexts in which Old English *fyren* and *āglǣca* do not imply condemnation (*Klaeber's Beowulf*: 168-169), but when four words or phrases that usually imply a moral disapproval of violence appear within fifteen lines, it looks like misplaced ingenuity to insist that the *Beowulf* poet himself takes the same uncritical view as the fictional pre-Christian poet.

He probably also alters the relationship between Sigemund and Fitela to make it more acceptable to a Christian audience, for the Old Norse Sigmundr is not only the uncle of Sinfjǫtli but also his father,

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as we learn from the account in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 7 (*FSN* I: 13-14). A Christian Anglo-Saxon audience would probably have found it hard to admire a hero who had committed incest with his sister, however extreme the circumstances and regardless of the old Germanic duty of vengeance. It looks as though the poet shares the common Christian view that the pre-Christian legendary heroes are all in Hell, however much one might admire their courage; we find the same assumption in Alcuin's assertion that Ingeld is now howling in Hell (cf. Chambers, 1959: 22) , and in the later Old Norse *Þorsteins þáttr skelks*, where the protagonist visits the king's privy during the night and meets a devil there, who tells him that of all the damned souls, Sigurðr is the one who bears his torment in Hell most stoically (*Flateyjarbók* I: 462-464).

But differences of moral outlook were not the only reason why the details of a traditional story might change. *Beowulf* probably reflects the earliest surviving understanding of the story of Sigemund; here, he is the slayer of the worm, and although the story of Guðhere, Hagena and the Burgundians is also alluded to in *Widsið* and *Waldere* (Hill, 2009: 106-108), Old English sources never link them to Sigemund or his family. In the Norse and German traditions, by contrast, there are two heroes: the father Sigmundr / Siegmunt and his son Sigurðr / Sîfrit. How this came about is not clear, but the likeliest explanation may be that a dragon-slaying story of mythological origin became loosely attached to a quasi-historical narrative in which the Burgundians treacherously killed the hero; this episode combined folk memories of the Burgundian King Gundaharius (killed in 437) and the assassination of the Frankish King Sigeberht II in 575. The treasure gained by the dragon slayer might then have given the Burgundians a motive for their attack on him, and this would make it necessary to transfer the dragon-slaying from the older hero to the younger one, leaving Sigemund / Sigmundr with only his adventures with Fitela / Sinfjǫtli. Those Old Norse sources which name the dragon slayer are unanimous in calling him Sigurðr; there are allusions to the slaying of Fáfnir in skaldic poetry from the mid-tenth century onwards, although the slayer is not explicitly named as Sigurðr until about a century later (McKinnell, 2015: 50-77).

However, the numerous Old Norse versions are unanimous about most of the details: Sigurðr's treacherous foster-father Reginn forges a miraculous sword for him and eggs him on to kill Reginn's brother Fáfnir, who is or has become an *ormr* 'serpent'. Sigurðr mortally wounds Fáfnir by hiding in a pit and stabbing him from below when he comes to the water to drink; before he dies, Fáfnir warns Sigurðr that the treasure will cause his death and that Reginn will betray him, but Sigurðr doesn't believe him.

When Fáfnir is dead, Reginn comes out of hiding and tells Sigurðr to roast Fáfnir's heart, which Reginn himself intends to eat; while the roasting goes on, Reginn goes to sleep. Sigurðr pokes the heart with his thumb to see if it is cooked, burns his thumb and puts it in his mouth to soothe the pain. As soon as the juice from the heart touches his tongue, he can understand what the birds in a tree above him are saying, which is that Reginn intends to kill him. He chops Reginn's head off with his sword, loads Fáfnir's treasure onto the back of his horse Grani, and sets off on his next adventure, which is to ride a wall of fire and awaken the valkyrie Sigrdrífa, who has been punished by Óðinn for slaying the wrong leader in a battle.

Old Norse skaldic verse also provides examples of the person praised by the poet being compared with Sigurðr, just as the fictional poet in *Beowulf* juxtaposes the triumph of Beowulf with that of Sigemund. The most elaborate surviving example is Illugi Bryndœlaskáld's *flokkr* in praise of King Haraldr harðráði of Norway (who died at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066), which includes three *helmingar* (half-stanzas) in which the first and last lines are in praise of Haraldr while the middle two refer to important moments in the Sigurðr legend: the slaying of the worm Fáfnir, the roasting of his heart, and Sigurðr riding the wall of flame surrounding Sigrdrífa:

> Vargs vas munr, þats margan
> *(menskerðir stakk sverði*
> *myrkaurriða markar)*
> minn dróttinn rak flótta.
>
> Enn lét ulfa brynnir
> *(eiskaldi gramr beisku*
> *mildr helt orms of eldi)*
> austrfǫr þaðan gǫrva.
>
> Opt gekk á frið Frakka
> *(fljótreitt at bý snótar*
> *vasa dǫglingi duglum)*
> dróttinn minn fyr óttu[1].
> (*SP* II, 282-284)

[1] 'There was a feast for the wolf, when my lord / *(the necklace-divider [> GENEROUS MAN] stabbed* / *with a sword the rider of the forests' dark mud [>SNAKE])* / drove many a man in flight. // Furthermore, the one who gives drink to wolves / *(the generous ruler held the savage heart* / *of the worm over the fire)* / caused a journey east to be made from there. // Often he went against the peace of the Franks / *(it was not an easy ride to the lady's bower* / *for the capable prince)* / my lord, before dawn' (all translations are by the author). The poem's last stanza mentions Atli's treacherous invitation to Gunnarr and Hǫgni, but as this does not concern Sigurðr it is not quoted here.

These were clearly seen as crucial episodes, and all three of them are also illustrated on surviving picture-stones. Two well-known Swedish examples are the Ramsund rock carving in Södermanland (Sö 101) and the Drävle Stone in Uppland (U 1163, cf. Jansson, 1987: 145-147), and the stabbing of Fáfnir can also be seen in a number of Viking Age sculptures from Northern England and the Isle of Man[2]. The details of these make it clear that the version known there in the tenth and eleventh centuries reflected the Old Norse tradition rather than the one in *Beowulf*; unsurprisingly, nearly all of them are in areas influenced by Norse settlement.

Side B of the Heysham hogback (North Lancashire) shows a simpler version of the same iconography as that found at Ramsund: the figure of Fáfnir encircles the whole composition, Sigurðr stabs the worm from below, while his horse Grani stands ready to be loaded with Fáfnir's treasure, and two very large birds in a rather small tree discuss how Reginn intends to betray Sigurðr. Only a few miles away, a more elaborate version appears in two panels on the Halton Cross: in the lower one we see Reginn, surrounded by smith's tools, forging Sigurðr's sword, and above that, Reginn's headless body and a curled knot that probably represents Fáfnir, while the upper panel shows Sigurðr with his thumb close to his mouth, roasting Fáfnir's heart and above him, two birds on top of a rather elegant tree.

Side A of Stone 34 in the Viking-Age cemetery under York Minster shows the body of Fáfnir, Sigurðr sitting roasting the heart with his thumb in his mouth, the headless body of Reginn opposite him, and the horse Grani above him, while Side D shows him facing a two-headed Fáfnir head on (which may have been regarded as more heroic than stabbing the worm from below); next to him is a small figure to which I shall return later. In sculpture of this period from Northumbria or the Isle of Man, a figure with his thumb in his mouth must be assumed to be Sigurðr; other examples can be seen in fragmentary sculptures from Kirby Hill (North Yorkshire), Ripon Cathedral (North Yorkshire) and Malew (Isle of Man); the fragments from Kirby Hill also depict the headless Reginn and an abbreviated version of the stabbing of Fáfnir in which a sword pierces the worm without any human figure holding it.

It is no accident that all these monuments are in churches or churchyards: they are clearly intended as monuments to the dead, presumably praising them by association with the great legendary hero.

[2] For the northern English examples see Bailey (1980: 116-125) and *CASSS*; for those in the Isle of Man see Cubbon (1977: 22-26).

At Ramsund this association is made quite clear; the inscription reads:

> **siriþr : kiarþi : bur : þosi : muþiʀ :alriks : tutiʀ : urms : fur salu : hulmkirs : faþur : sukruþar buata sis**
> Sigríðr gerði brú þessa, móðir Alreks, dóttir Orms, fyrir sálu Holmgeirs, faðir Sigrøðar bónda síns
> 'Sigríðr, mother of Alrekr (and) daughter of Ormr, made this causeway for the soul of Hólmgeirr, the father of her husband Sigrøðr.'

In this case, Sigrøðr is probably a variant of the name Sigurðr (and Sigríðr may also be a female version of it), so she is certainly associating her family and possibly both her husband and herself with the legendary hero. Since names were often handed on within families, she may also be suggesting that her husband is a descendant of Sigurðr.

Such claims can also be found elsewhere: for example, in the Eddic poem *Hyndluljóð* (st. 25-26):

> Kunna ek báða
> Brodd ok Hǫrvi,
> váru þeir í hirð
> Hrólfs ins gamla,
> allir bornir
> frá Jǫrmunreki,
> Sigurðar mági
> – hlyð þú sǫgu minni –
> fólkum grimms
> þess er Fáfni vá.
>
> Sá var vísir
> frá Vǫlsungi
> ok Hjǫrdís
> frá Hrauðungi
> en Eylimi
> frá Qðlingum.
> Allt er þat ætt þín,
> Óttarr heimski[3].
> (*Eddukvæði* I, 464)

[3] 'I knew them both / Broddr and Hǫrvi – / they were in the war-band / of Hrólfr the Old, / all of them born / from Jǫrmunrekkr, / kinsman-in-law of Sigurðr / – listen to my story – / of that man, fierce to armies, / who killed Fáfnir. // That prince was / descended from Vǫlsungr / and Hjǫrdís / (was descended) from Hrauðungr, / but Eylimi / (was descended) from the Qðlingar. / They are all your kindred, / Óttarr the Foolish.'

Admittedly, the intention of these verses may be satirical; Andy Orchard (2011: 339) has suggested that Óttarr the Foolish may be a fictionalised version of the Norwegian counsellor Óttarr Birting, who was not of high birth but married the widowed Queen Ingríðr Ragnvaldsdóttir. He was assassinated at some time in the 1140s, and it may be that other powerful men in Norway regarded his marriage as presumptuous because of his humble origins. However, there are many other examples of poets claiming legendary or divine ancestry for their patrons, and if the poet's aim was to satirise the historical Óttarr, it can only have been because his family did not really have the established claim to descent from legendary heroes which was claimed in all seriousness by other noblemen. It is also noticeable that many of the other names in this list of supposed ancestors are defined by their relationship to Sigurðr, who is the only one for whom a heroic deed is mentioned. The list includes his mother, both his grandfathers and his son-in-law, and st. 27 adds his wife (Guðrún), three brothers-in-law (Gunnarr, Hǫgni and the possibly illegitimate Guthormr) and father-in-law (Gjúki). The fact that the only thing that all these figures have in common is their relationship to Sigurðr underlines his position as the pre-eminent legendary hero.

Some evidence for dragon-slaying legends in later medieval times can also be found in the ceremonial processions which took place each year in several English cities – and indeed, there is a surviving example in the form of a metal dragon figure from Norwich, which is now in the city museum there and has been given the affectionate nickname 'Snap'[4]. In most cases these processional dragons seem to have no connection with Germanic legend, but are part of the celebrations on St. George's Day, to which there are also some French and Italian parallels. Besides the example from Norwich, there were processions of St. George and the dragon in London, Bristol, York and Newcastle. The only dragon procession I know of which is not connected with St. George is the one at Ripon, where the annual accounts of the Chamberlain of the cathedral monastery often include payment to a man for carrying the processional dragon on the Rogation days (the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Ascension week) and on Ascension Day itself[5]. The earliest of these payments dates from 1439-1440 and the latest from 1540-1541, when the custom was suppressed. Here there is no link with St. George, and some French parallels suggest that the dragon led the procession on the three

[4] Further on processional dragons and their pyrotechnics see Butterworth (2013).

[5] Leeds, Brotherton Library MS Ripon 183; see McGee (2018).

rogation days, but that on Ascension Day it followed the image of a lion, who represented Christ triumphing over the devil. But even at Ripon there is no reason to connect the dragon procession with Germanic legend.

However, when we turn to later folktales there is a mass of evidence. It is usually impossible to tell how old any British folktale is – there is often no written version before the nineteenth century, although the tale itself may have existed in oral form for centuries before that[6]. Some local legends, like that of the Sockburn Worm, are referred to in early 17th century sources[7], but such allusions are matters of chance and do not necessarily imply that these stories are older than the others. The majority, like nearly all the Sigurðr carvings, come from Northumbria or other areas of Norse settlement, including one from Orkney, and on average they also show more typical features than those from other parts of Britain[8].

Although there are many variations in individual stories, they show a common basic pattern:

1. The antagonist against which the hero fights is usually called a 'worm'[9].
2. In many of the stories it originates from water, usually a river or pool.
3. After it begins to terrorise the district it may install itself on a nearby hill.
4. The hero is usually a member or the founder of the local landowning family.

[6] For a fuller list of folktale examples, see Simpson (1978); I omit versions from Celtic-speaking areas, minor variants from the same or adjacent places (e.g. Simpson includes four versions of Mordiford and a variant of Sockburn from Bishop Auckland), and versions in which there is no combat, where the monster is not killed, or where it is some other sort of animal.

[7] E.g. for an early reference to the Sockburn Worm, see London, BL MS Harley 2118.

[8] The only partial exception is Herefordshire, where the versions from Brinsop and Mordiford may have been influenced by Scandinavian influence resulting from King Cnut strengthening the Welsh border and making grants of land there to former members of his Scandinavian army (see Stenton, 1947: 410).

[9] It is a 'worm' at Orkney ('Assipattle and the Stoor Worm', see Marwick (1975), Dalry, Moston, Unsworth, Wantley, Aller and Bisterne; a 'serpent' at Handale, Nunnington, Slingsby, Brent Pelham, Deerhurst and West Clandon; a 'wyvern' at Mordiford; a 'knucker' at Lyminster. In some cases, 'dragon' and 'serpent' may be labels imposed by the antiquarians who collected the stories rather than the term actually used by the informant.

5. He equips himself with a bizarre form of armour[10] or an unusual weapon[11].
6. The fight sometimes takes place in a river; when the hero cuts off parts of the worm, the river may wash them away and prevent them from joining together again, or the hero's dog carries them off[12].
7. The hero's dog(s) is/are killed, usually by the venomous breath of the worm (in Lambton the dog is sacrificed so that the hero can avoid killing his father).
8. The hero is victorious but sometimes dies soon afterwards because of the worm's venomous breath.
9. What happens to the dead body of the worm is not always specified; when it is, it is either returned to the river or pool from which it came, or it dies by burning up in its own heat, like Sigemund's antagonist in *Beowulf*[13]. In two versions it is skinned, either so that its skin can be kept as a trophy or as part of a scheme for maximising a grant of land[14].
10. The truth of the story is vouched for by a physical memorial, usually a tomb, sculpture or painting in the local church[15].

Apart from the basic story motif of the hero killing the worm, two of these features are conspicuously frequent: the association with a local landowning family (in 14 of the 24 versions), and the use of a church monument, carving or painting to vouch for the truth of the story (in

[10] Armour covered with sharp blades (Dalry, Lambton, Nunnington, Wantley); a barrel studded with blades and hooks (Mordiford); birdlime sprinkled with broken glass (Bisterne); a metal case disguised as a cow (Farnworth).

[11] A burning peat (Orkney, Linton); a falchion (Sockburn); a huge sword (Castle Carlton); a huge spear (Aller); a dagger shot from a gun (Unsworth); an axe (Deerhurst); a boulder (Kingston St. Mary); a poisoned pie (Lyminster); a bayonet (West Clandon).

[12] For the fight in or beside the river, see Lambton, Sockburn, Mordiford; for the fight in or near a pool or well, see Longwitton, Wantley, Brinsop and Lyminster; for the dog removing the pieces of the worm, see Nunnington; in the Orkney story the worm is in the sea.

[13] At Dalry, Lambton and Sockburn the worm's corpse goes back into the river; at Linton and in the Orkney story it is burnt up in its own heat (in Orkney its burnt body parts become the islands of Orkney, the Faeroes and Iceland).

[14] At Sexhow and Farnworth respectively.

[15] One or more sculptures (in churches unless otherwise stated) at Lambton (tombs), Linton (tympanum, probably a mistaken St. George figure), Moston (carving on chapel screen), Nunnington (tomb, where a lion at the foot of a knight's effigy has been mistaken for a dog), Slingsby (tomb), Sockburn (tomb and weapon), Unsworth (a table in the manor house), Brinsop (tympanum, cf. Linton), Aller (weapon), Bisterne (carvings at the manor house), Brent Pelham (tomb), Deerhurst (carvings in church), Kingston St. Mary (carving on church tower), Lyminster (tomb in churchyard), West Clandon (carving in church); paintings in church at Handale and Mordiford.

17 versions); the next most frequent feature is the association with water (in 9 versions). This suggests that, like the Viking Age Sigurðr sculptures, these worm-slaying stories served to assert the prestige of local landowning families by claiming their descent from a legendary hero and placing a reminder of this in a sacred setting which the local population visited regularly.

There are of course some differences between the story of Sigurðr and the post-medieval folktales – for example, the episode in which the hero roasts the worm's heart and gains understanding of what the birds are saying has dropped out of the folk tradition, possibly because it complicates the story and makes the hero depend on a treacherous helper, the Reginn figure, whose role and motivation would then need to be explained. But traces of the Reginn figure remain in the hero's strange weapon or armour, which may be made for him by an anonymous smith, as at Nunnington; at Dalry and Farnworth the hero is himself a smith, and at Lambton the Reginn figure is replaced by a witch who tells the hero the kind of armour he needs in order to defeat the worm.

Another element which has largely disappeared is the treasure which the hero wins by killing the worm, which in the folktales is usually transformed into lordship over landed estates. The only exception in the stories I have found is at Castle Carlton, where the hero gives the treasure to the shrine of St. Guthlac at Crowland – a gift which both emphasises his piety and protects his descendants from any possible accusation that they are so rich that they ought to be more generous to their tenants.

On the other hand, many of the folktales include three details which are merely hinted at in the Sigurðr story. One of these is the faithful dog which helps the hero but nearly always dies in the struggle[16]. It has been suggested that this may be a rationalisation of the lion which appears at the feet of the knight in some tomb effigies, although the animal at the feet of the effigy at Sockburn is clearly a dog; it is possible that this iconography may originate from depictions of the Sigurðr story which include a four footed animal (possibly originally a wolf, representing Reginn's treachery)[17], as at Ramsund and possibly on Side D of York

[16] See Handale, Nunnington, Slingsby, Sockburn, Bisterne, Brent Pelham, West Clandon; at Lambton the hero has promised the witch who advised him that he will kill the first living creature he sees after slaying the worm, but when this turns out to be his father he kills the dog instead, thus provoking the curse that nine generations of his family will die by violence.

[17] Cf. *Atlakviða* 8 (*Eddukvæði* II, 374), where Guðrún twines a wolf's hair into a ring as a warning that Atli's invitation is treacherous, and Gunnarr interprets it correctly, commenting *ylfskr er vegr okkarr / at ríða ørindi* 'our way is wolfish, to

Minster stone 34 and the extreme left of the Heysham hogback (although both of these are very indistinct).

A second motif which is present in the Sigurðr story but not emphasised is the association of the worm with water, usually either a river or a deep pool. This must be ancient: in *Beowulf* (3131-3133) the Geats push the worm's corpse over a cliff and allow the sea to take it away, and the Anglo-Norse sculptural tradition also includes examples of the Miðgarðsormr, the World Serpent, which lies beneath the waves (e.g. on Lowther hogback 5, where the waves are depicted as daughters of Rán and Ægir) and with which the god Þórr has two great struggles: first when he goes fishing for it (see the Gosforth Fishing Stone), and secondly when the two of them are destined to destroy each other at Ragnarǫk, the future downfall of the gods (as depicted on the Skipwith stone and probably on stone 25 at Sockburn).

Finally, there is the fact that, as in the myth of Þórr and the World Serpent and in the last part of *Beowulf*, the hero often dies shortly after having killed the worm[18]. Obviously, Sigurðr cannot die as a result of his struggle with Fáfnir, since he must go on to release Sigrdrífa, become involved with Brynhildr and Guðrún and be betrayed and murdered by the Burgundians, so it is not surprising that this is the only feature of the story for which most of the folklore examples come from outside the areas of Norse influence.

But what did the figure of the worm signify? Whether we are looking at Old English and Old Norse poetry, Anglo-Norse sculpture or post-medieval folktale, slaying the worm is clearly regarded as a praiseworthy deed. This may be partly because it is a paradoxical opposite of whatever is human: a reptile (normally earth-bound) which can nonetheless fly, a cold-blooded creature which can breathe fire or venom, while human beings are not reptilian, cannot fly, are not cold-blooded and cannot breathe fire or poison. For early poets the worm clearly represented chaos and destruction, and the Gosforth Fishing Stone probably contrasts Þórr's ultimate inability to catch the World Serpent (in the lower panel) with Christ, seen in the upper panel as the stag successfully trampling under his feet the serpent who represents the devil:

> Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. (Psalm 91,13)

ride on this expedition'.

[18] See Nunnington, Slingsby, Mordiford, Aller, Bisterne, Brent Pelham, Lyminster.

> Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices. (Song of Songs 8,14)

In the Ascension week processions at Ripon the dragon again signified the devil, and in some medieval literary sources it becomes identified with human sin. Thus in ch. 14 of the thirteenth-century *Vǫlsunga saga* (*FSN* I, 32), Fáfnir was originally a man but has become a worm because of his violence and greed:

> 'Síðan drap Fáfnir föður sinn', segir Reginn, 'ok myrði hann, ok náða ek engu af fénu. Hann gerðist svá illr, at hann lagðist út ok unni engum at njóta fjárins nema sér ok varð síðan at inum versta ormi ok liggr nú á því fé'[19].

Most of the folktales emphasise the destructive nature of the worm towards local people and their property, particularly their livestock[20], so the lordship of the hero's descendants over the area may represent a guarantee of security and prosperity for the local farming population. But whether it stands for chaos in nature, fear of famine, sinful human beings or the devil himself, the worm is always an enemy of humankind, as it remains, for example, in Tolkien's character of Smaug. In very recent times, books and films such as *How to Train your Dragon*, have created a different role for it, in which it becomes a rather cuddly threatened species of animal. This seems to me to be a distortion which reflects a loss of the ability to think in symbolic terms and fails to acknowledge the dark caves of the mind which are the worm's natural home – but then, that would be another study altogether.

[19] 'Afterwards Fáfnir killed his father', says Reginn, 'and murdered him, and I got none of the treasure. He became so evil that he lay down outside and allowed no one to enjoy the treasure but himself, and afterwards he turned into the worst of worms, and now he lies on top of that treasure.'

[20] There are a few exceptions: at Aller it burns their crops; at Handale it feasts on the delicate limbs of young damsels; at Dalry it digs up recently buried bodies in the churchyard.

Appendix: Summary of Folktale Versions

(excluding versions in Celtic languages and minor local variants)
[motifs included in each are in square brackets]; {adapted motifs are in curly brackets}
* indicates that the 'corroborating evidence' can still be seen today

A. Geographical distribution

Northumbria and Other Norse-Influenced Areas (15 versions)

Castle Carlton, Lincolnshire (*LL* 444-445 [4,5a,10])
Dalry, Galloway (*TG* 28-30 [1,2,3,5b,6,7])
Farnworth, Lancashire (*LL* 396-397 [3,4,5b,10])
Handale, North Yorkshire (*LL* 826 [4,7,8,10])
Lambton, Co. Durham (*LL* 237-241 [1,2,3,4,5b,6,7,{8},{9},10*])
Linton, Roxburghshire (Somerville, 1815: I, 38-46 [1,3,4,5a,6,7,10*])
Longwitton, Northumberland (*Longwitton Dragon*, 2017 [2,6])
Moston, Cheshire (*LL* 85 [2,4,10]);
Nunnington, North Yorkshire (*LL* 831-834 [3,4,5b,7,8,9,10*]);
Orkney ('Assipattle') (Marwick, 1975: 201-202 [1,2,3,{6},7])
Sexhow, North Yorkshire (*LL* 895; Gutch, 1901: 80 [1,3,9,10]);
Slingsby, North Yorkshire (*LL* 839-840 [4,7,8,9,10*]);
Sockburn, Co. Durham (*LL* 244 [1,2,4,5a,6,8,10*]);
Unsworth, Lancashire (*LL* 409 [4,5a,9,10]).
Wantley, South Yorkshire (Percy, 1966: III, 283-288 [3,4,5b,6])

Other Areas (9 versions)

Aller, Somerset (*LL* 634 [3,4,5a,8,9,10*])
Bisterne, Hampshire (*LL* 298 [3,5b,8,9,10*])
Brent Pelham, Hertfordshire (*LL* 335, 338 [4,7,8,9,10])
Brinsop, Herefordshire (*LL* 319 [1,2,6,10*])
Deerhurst, Gloucestershire (*LL* 286-287 [5a,10*])
Kingston St. Mary, Somerset (*LL* 648 [1,3,9,10])
Lyminster, Sussex (*LL* 732 [2,6,8,9,10*])
Mordiford, Herefordshire (*LL* 327 [2,4,5b,9,10*])
West Clandon, Surrey (*LL* 721 [5,7,8,10*])

B. Themes

1. *Term used for the monster*:
Worm: Dalry, Lambton, Linton, Orkney, Sexhow, Sockburn, Kingston St. Mary, (Castle Carlton?), (Brinsop?);
Dragon: Farnworth, Longwitton, Moston, Unsworth, Aller, Bisterne;
Serpent: Handale, Nunnington, Slingsby, Brent Pelham, Deerhurst, West Clandon;
Wyvern: Mordiford;
Knucker: Lyminster (from OE *nicor* 'water monster').

2. *The monster's origin is in water or its strength is derived from water*:
River: Dalry (the River Ken), Lambton (the River Wear), Sockburn, Mordiford (next to the Rivers Tees and Lugg respectively);
Pool(s) or Well: (Lambton), Longwitton, Brinsop, Lyminster;
Swamp: Moston;
The Sea: Orkney.

3. *The monster dominates the area from a nearby hill*:
Dalry, Farnworth, Lambton, Linton, Nunnington, Sexhow, Aller, Bisterne, Kingston St. Mary.

4. *The hero is the founder or a member of a named local landowning family*:
Castle Carlton, Farnworth, Handale, Lambton, Linton, Moston, Nunnington, Sexhow, Slingsby, Sockburn, Unsworth, Aller, Bisterne, Brent Pelham;
Or: the hero is a saint (St. George at Brinsop), *or a romance hero* (Guy of Warwick at Longwitton).

5. *The hero uses an unusual weapon (5a) or a bizarre form of armour (5b)*:
a) *Armour covered with sharp blades*: (Dalry, Lambton, Nunnington, Mordiford [a barrel covered with hooks and blades, one variant only], Bisterne [bird lime and pieces of broken glass]; *a metal case which disguises him as a cow*: (Farnworth);
b) *A huge or unusual weapon*: a huge sword (Castle Carlton) or spear (Aller), a falchion (Sockburn); a burning peat (Linton, Orkney), a dagger shot from a gun (Unsworth);

or a more mundane weapon: an axe (Deerhurst), a bayonet (West Clandon), a boulder (Kingston St. Mary), a poisoned pie (Lyminster).

6. *The fight takes place in a river* (Dalry, Lambton, Sockburn), *in or near a pool or well* (Longwitton, Wantley, Brinsop, Lyminster) *or in the sea* (Orkney).

7. *The worm's remains are returned to the water* (Dalry, Lambton, Sockburn), *are carried away by the hero's dog* (Nunnington) *or the worm's corpse burns away* (Linton, Orkney [where its burnt-out body parts become islands]).
Other versions do not include what happens to it (but at Farnworth and Sexhow it is skinned).

8. *The hero has a dog or dogs to help him; it usually dies, poisoned by the worm*:
Handale, Nunnington, Slingsby, Sockburn, Brent Pelham, West Clandon (where the dog survives); at Lambton the hero kills the dog to avoid killing his father.

9. *The hero dies soon afterwards, poisoned by the venom of the worm*: Nunnington, Slingsby, Mordiford, Aller, Bisterne, Brent Pelham (one variant), Lyminster; at Lambton nine generations of his family will die by violence.

10. *A monument (usually) in the parish church or a weapon kept there is cited to prove that the story is true*:
Castle Carlton (weapon), Farnworth (the worm's skin), Handale (coffin lid), Lambton (tombs in Chester-le-Street church), Linton (tympanum), Moston (carving on chapel screen), Nunnington (tomb), Sexhow (the worm's skin), Slingsby (tomb), Sockburn (tomb and weapon), Brinsop (tympanum), Aller (weapon), Brent Pelham (tomb), Deerhurst (carvings in church), Kingston St. Mary (carving on church tower), Lyminster (tomb in churchyard), West Clandon (carving in church), Mordiford (painting in church).
Or: the monument is in or outside the family's manor house: Unsworth (a table in the manor house), Bisterne (carvings at the manor house).

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