

Beowulf

Background Info (cont)

- Setting is actually in **Scandinavia** (today modern day Sweden and Denmark)
- Various elements of the story were probably passed down by **oral**, Anglo-Saxon story-tellers
- Many aspects of the poem are fictional (the characters Beowulf, Grendel, Grendel's mother, etc.), but it does seem to have **historical roots**. The kings Hrothgar, Hygelac, and Onela were all real men.

The Poem

- over 3000 lines long
- written in an unrhymed **four-beat alliterative verse**

HOWET, WE GAM DEHA in gearstigeum,
Leodcyninga byrn gearweor,
hu do aþingas efen fremdon
eot Scaþf Scyþena scyrdum.

LO, praise of the prowess of people-kings
of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,
we have heard, and what honor the shielding word
ON Scyld the Scaþing from seawarped lace,

Background Information

- generally considered to be the **earliest major work of English prose**
- dates to sometime **between 700-1000 AD**
- composed in Old English (Anglo-Saxon)
- is great deal of mystery surrounds Beowulf. We do not know if it is the work of one poet, or descended from oral storytelling

The Poem (cont)

- tells the story of a noble warrior who becomes King of the Geats
- Divided into 3 parts:
 - Beowulf as a young warrior: fights Grendel and Grendel's mom
 - Beowulf's days as the ruler of the Geats
 - Beowulf's final battle to protect his kingdom

- The original manuscript is owned by the British Library in London.
- it was **damaged** in a fire in 1731. As a result, the pages are burned and brittle, and parts of them are illegible.
- There was no title included in the manuscript; it was added later by scholars.

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HOWET, WE GAM DEHA in geseardum,
Leodcyninga byrn geseacor,
hu do aþelwiga ofer fremodan
eot dragit Seofing scumbana brodum.

LO, praise of the prowess of people-kings
of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,
we have heard, and what honor the atheling won!
ON Scaht the Seofing from squarred loes,

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The Poem

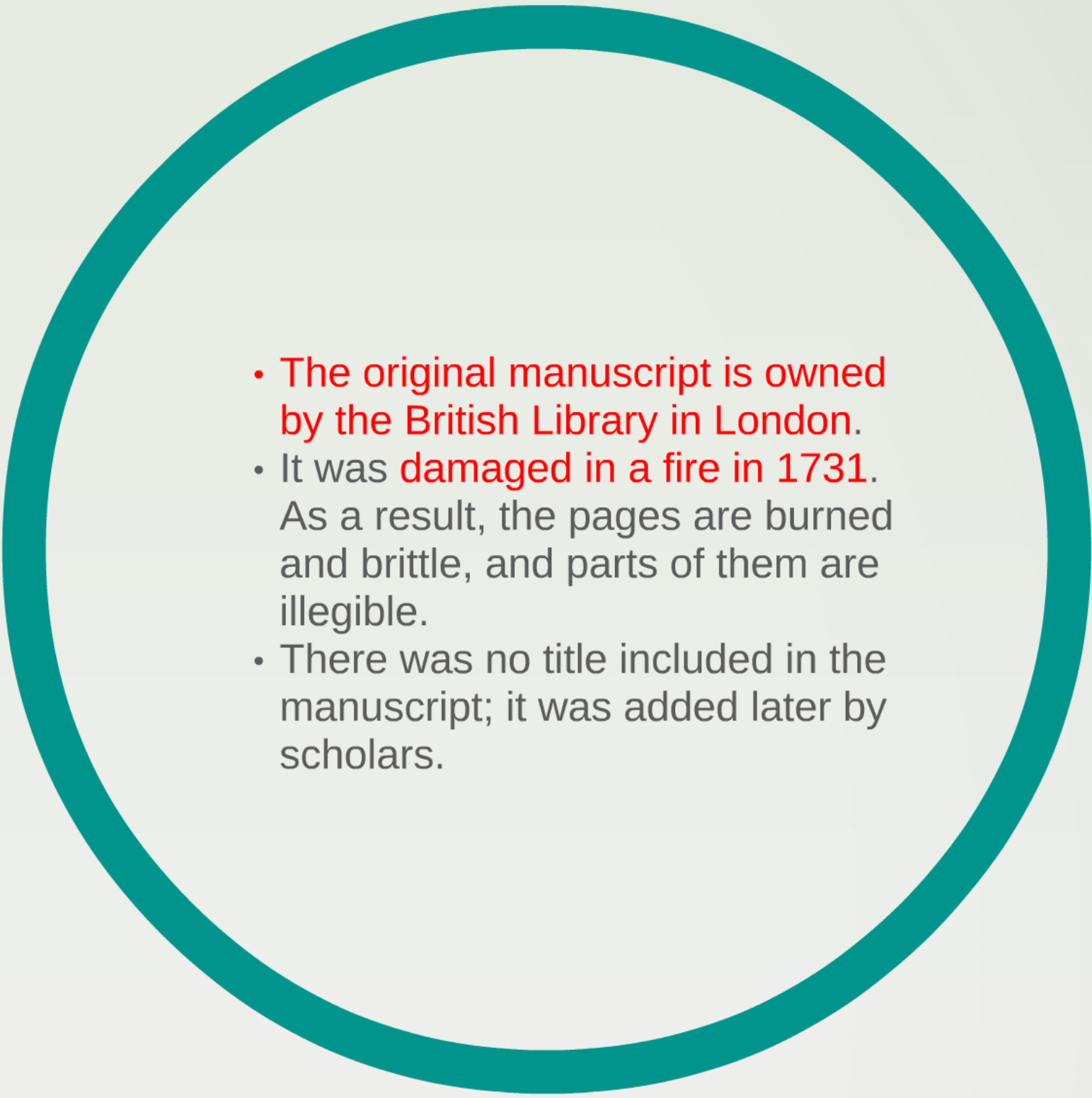
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HWÆT, WE GAR-DEna in geardagum,
þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æpelingas ellen fremedon!
oft Scyld Scefing sceapena þreatum,

LO, praise of the prowess of people-kings
of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,
we have heard, and what honor the athelings won!
Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes,

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