

Winter 2015

# Riddling Meaning from OE - haga compounds


Jeff Massey Ph.D.

*Molloy College*, [jmassey@molloy.edu](mailto:jmassey@molloy.edu)

Karma DeGruy

*Emory University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.molloy.edu/eng\\_fac](https://digitalcommons.molloy.edu/eng_fac)

 Part of the [Literature in English, Anglophone outside British Isles and North America Commons](#), [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#), and the [Medieval Studies Commons](#)  
DigitalCommons@Molloy Feedback

---

## Recommended Citation

Massey, Jeff Ph.D. and DeGruy, Karma, "Riddling Meaning from OE - haga compounds" (2015). *Faculty Works: English*. 2.  
[https://digitalcommons.molloy.edu/eng\\_fac/2](https://digitalcommons.molloy.edu/eng_fac/2)

This Peer-Reviewed Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at DigitalCommons@Molloy. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Works: English by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Molloy. For more information, please contact [tochtera@molloy.edu](mailto:tochtera@molloy.edu), [thasin@molloy.edu](mailto:thasin@molloy.edu).

# Riddling Meaning from Old English *-haga* Compounds

by Jeff Massey and Karma DeGruy

Although the Anglo-Saxon compound *anhaga* (appearing in *Beowulf*, *The Wanderer*, *Andreas*, *Elene*, *Phoenix*, *Maxims II*, and *Riddle 5* of the *Exeter Book*) is often translated as “loner” or “solitary one,” such paraphrases seem to ignore half of the compound (an: “one” or “lone”) at the expense of the other (*haga*: “hedge” or “haw”). A survey of various *-haga* compounds (*gemærhaga*, *swinhaga*, *turfhaga*, *wighaga*, *cumbolhaga*, *bordhaga*, and *færhaga*) underscores the importance of both elements and suggests that modern translators place more emphasis upon the “hedge” half of *anhaga* as well. Since *haga* may describe the Anglo-Saxon shield-wall formation composed of individual shield-bearers arranged in a tight formation akin to that of a horticultural hedgerow, we suggest a translation of *anhaga* as “lone hedge warrior” or “solitary shield-bearer,” a designation akin to those of shield-bearing Greek hoplites (named for their unit’s defining defensive armament, the *hoplon*) and American G.I.s (named for their common “general issue” or “government issue” military equipment). Yet unlike these soldiers, to be named *anhaga* identified the Germanic warrior as a particularly solitary figure, one separated from the *wighaga* (battle-hedge), and thus a soldier without support: a “lone hedge warrior.”

THE nominal compound *anhaga* occurs in seven Old English works—*Riddle 5* in the *Exeter Book*, *The Wanderer*, *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, *Elene*, *Maxims II*, and *Phoenix*—and is often translated into modern English as “lone man” or “solitary one.” Such translations generally make contextual sense, of course: the *Wanderer* is alone at sea; *Beowulf* (in this flashback) is likewise adrift alone; *Andreas* is alone among heathens; the wolf of *Riddle 5* is often a solitary animal; and the *Phoenix* is the only one of its kind. Yet the compound *anhaga* is misrepresented by any translation that addresses only the first half of the compound, *an* (“one” or “lone”), at the expense of the second half, *haga* (“haw” or

"hedge"). A detailed review of *haga* and *-haga* compounds (including *gemærhaga*, *swinhaga*, *turfhaga*, *wighaga*, *cumbolhaga*, *bordhaga*, and *færhaga*) reveals a pattern of meaning strongly suggesting that the compound *anhaga* should carry the full force of both halves of its construction. Further investigation shows that many *-haga* compounds carry martial connotations, and that *haga* itself can describe the Anglo-Saxon shield-wall formation composed of individual shield-bearers arranged in a tight formation akin to that of a horticultural hedgerow. Ultimately, we should translate *anhaga* as "lone hedge warrior" or "solitary shield-bearer," a designation akin to that of the *hoplite*, the shield-bearing Greek soldier who was defined by his particular defensive armament (his *hoplon*, or shield) and his membership in the premier classical martial formation, the phalanx. Unlike the designation *hoplite*, however, to be named an *anhaga* marked the separation of the single Germanic warrior from the *comitatus* (or more specifically, from the *wighaga*), thus signifying his isolation as a soldier without support: a "one-man wall" or "lone hedge warrior."

Anglo-Saxon charters are by far the most fruitful of sources for uncompounded *haga* occurrences; there are over 250 listed in a simple search of the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, each adhering to the general meaning "hawthorn bush," "hedge," or "space enclosed by a hedge."<sup>1</sup> The *OED* defines "hedge" as "a row of bushes or low trees (e.g., hawthorn, or privet) planted closely together to form a boundary between pieces of land or at the sides of a road; the usual form of fence in England."<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Bosworth-Toller defines *haga* as "a place fenced in, an enclosure, a haw, a dwelling in a town," and the supplemental entry emphasizes the utility of *haga* as a boundary marker, calling it "a fence, a fenced enclosure."<sup>3</sup> In both cases, *haga* is a spatially limited noun designating boundaries. One should also note that the purpose of enclosure is often twofold: to limit egress and to limit access. That is, a *haga* can both contain and protect.

<sup>1</sup> Antonette diPaolo Healey, ed., *The Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/pages/pub/web-corpus.html>.

<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "hedge," <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/85371>. While modern American farms tend to use pickets, timber, and wire as fencing, the English have long used the eponymous hawthorn (*haga* or *hagaporn*) as hedging material. As *Encyclopædia Britannica* notes, "The hawthorn is well-suited to form hedges, and its combination of sturdy twigs, hard wood, and many thorns makes it a formidable barrier to cattle and hogs." *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. "hawthorn," last updated February 28, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/257588/hawthorn>.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, eds., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s.v. "haga," <http://ebeowulf.uky.edu/BT/bosworth.htm>.

Also among the charters are several occurrences of the compound *gemærhaga*, “boundary hedge.”<sup>4</sup> A grant of land to the church of Saints Peter and Paul is bounded in part by “gemærhagan to hrimwolde beorge to þæm ealdan wege” (the boundary-hedge to the hill of Hrimwolde to the old road).<sup>5</sup> A land grant at Bathampton is bounded in part along “mærhagan on herces dic” (the boundary-hedge to Heric’s Dike),<sup>6</sup> and boundaries in Berkshire, Abingdon, and Worcester run in part along a “gemærhagan.”<sup>7</sup> A single passage in a Somerset charter clearly illustrates a distinction among *mære*, *haga*, and *gemærhaga*: the borders of the grant run first “norð andlang dic” (north along the dike), then “east on þone mær hagan” (east to the boundary-hedge), then “andlang hagan suþ” (south along the hedge), and finally “west andlang hear poðes suð on þa ealdan dic” (west along the southern highway to the old dike).<sup>8</sup> In each example, both halves of the compound (*ge*)*mærhaga* are essential to the meaning. That is, a *gemærhaga* is neither just a *mære* (“boundary” or “border”) nor is it simply a *haga* (a “hawthorn bush” or “hedge”). A *gemærhaga*—a boundary-hedge—is a specific type of *haga*.<sup>9</sup> To borrow a phrase from Caroline Brady’s extensive articulation of Anglo-Saxon nominal compounds, *mære* plus *haga* forms a bipartite appellation, where 1+2=1+2.<sup>10</sup> Both halves of the compound contribute to its meaning.

<sup>4</sup> Charters are cited according to Peter Sawyer’s number (S) unless otherwise specified, as given in *The Electronic Sawyer: Online Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Charters*, <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html#>, with Kemble number (K) referring to the print edition in J. M. Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, 6 vols. (London, 1839–48).

<sup>5</sup> S 310, K 1051. Translations are ours unless otherwise noted.

<sup>6</sup> S 627, K 440.

<sup>7</sup> S 673, K 1221; S 605, K 441; and S 201, K 266 respectively.

<sup>8</sup> S 571, K 1174. See also S 1370, K 515.

<sup>9</sup> G. B. Grundy translates both *haga* and *gemærhagan* as “hedge or game enclosure,” making no distinction for the compound. However, he thinks that neither *haga* or *hege* indicates a live hedge, arguing that “live hedges seem to have been introduced in later times.” A *haga*, Grundy argues, was “a more formidable type of fence, constructed with a view to preventing wild animals, or swine pastured in the woods, from passing over it. . . . [I]t came to be applied to the actual areas which it enclosed; and so there has been added the alternative interpretation ‘game enclosure’” (Grundy, “Berkshire Charters,” *The Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archaeological Journal* 27 [1923]: 196 n. 3). Whether or not one accepts Grundy’s claim that such boundaries were not live hedges of hawthorn, there does seem to be a distinction made in these charters (and thus presumably in common parlance) between a boundary, a hedge, and a boundary-hedge, and it seems likely that *gemærhaga* refers at least sometimes to an enclosure designed to contain or protect what is within it.

<sup>10</sup> Brady establishes the case for “direct bipartite appellations specifying the referent,” in “‘Weapons’ in *Beowulf*: An Analysis of the Nominal Compounds and an Evaluation of the Poet’s Use of Them,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979): 128, and in “‘Warriors’ in *Beowulf*: An Analysis of the Nominal Compounds and an Evaluation of the Poet’s Use of Them,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1983): 242.

Other *-haga* compounds describe equally practical types of hedges. The most pungent of *-haga* compounds occurs in S 1368 (K 1287): “Andlang ðære dic swa upp on ða ecgge, and swa þurh ðone graf be ðan aldan swinhagan” (Along the ditch and up onto the edge, and so through the grove by the old swine-hedge). The modern English term “pigpen” holds much the same practical, earthy physicality of the Old English *swinhaga*, a type of *gemærhaga* that encloses its property. In addition to protecting its porcine property from “outsiders”—from thieves or predators—the *swinhaga* also keeps its charges from running out of bounds. In short, a *swinhaga* guards against the enemy while encouraging group cohesion.

Like the muddy *swinhaga*, *turfhaga*, as recorded in Cynewulf’s *Elene*,<sup>11</sup> roots the compounded *haga* firmly in the earthly plane:

Ongan þa wilfægen æfter þam wuldres treo,  
 elnes anhydig, eorðan delfan  
 under turfhagan, þæt he on XX  
 fotmælum feor funde behelede,  
 under neolum, niðer næsse gehydde  
 in þeostorcofan.

(827–32)

[He began then, eager, steadfast of courage, to delve into the earth, under the turf-hedge, for the tree of glory, so that in a depth of twenty foot-measures he found (it) concealed, down under depths, hidden in a dark chamber.]

Unlike the vertically inclined horticultural hedges noted so far, this turf-hedge (or layer of sod) interposes itself along the horizontal plane. But just as the *swinhaga* serves to guard its swinish contents from thieves, this *turfhaga* serves to physically protect or shield its charge—the True Cross—from transgressors.

While *gemærhaga*, *swinhaga*, and *turfhaga* expose the horticultural roots of *haga* as a physical boundary composed of hawthorn or turf, other *-haga* compounds expand the basic compositional elements of the hedge to include men and shields, thus suggesting the military utility of a hedge formation.<sup>12</sup> That is, just as the shield and the spear were,

<sup>11</sup> *Elene* contains three *-haga* compounds: *turfhaga*, *bordhaga*, and *anhaga*, each to be discussed separately. In George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Vercelli Book*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

<sup>12</sup> For an overview of Anglo-Saxon shield-wall scholarship, see Stephen Pollington, *The English Warrior from Earliest Times to 1066* (Frithgarth: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1996): 128–30 and 180–86; and Stephen S. Evans, *The Lords of Battle: Image and Reality of the Comitatus in Dark-Age Britain* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), 38–40.

in Brady's words, "the essential weapons of the Germanic warrior,"<sup>13</sup> and the shield his only uniform defensive armament,<sup>14</sup> the *scildweall* (shield-wall) or *wighaga* (battle-hedge) was the essential military formation of the *eaxlgestealna* (shoulder-companions). Although the battle tactics of Anglo-Saxons remain uncertain, the repeated use of shield-wall imagery in poems such as *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon*, and *The Battle of Brunanburh* reflects a "battlefield practice in which, for the greater part of the army, successful maintenance of the defensive line was [the] best hope for survival."<sup>15</sup> Like the Greek *phalanx* or the Roman *testudo*, the Anglo-Saxon *wighaga*—a tightly knit group of shield-warriors who relied upon one another for protection in battle—could be a formidable offensive and defensive formation when employed precisely, just as a careful arrangement of hawthorn bushes could be a formidable defense against predation. And indeed, the parallels between the martial and domestic hedge formations are worth noting further.

Horticulturally speaking, a hedge is composed of individual plants (in England, typically of the eponymous hawthorn bush). Alone, a one-plant hedge can neither protect what is behind it nor effectively repel intruders. But linked together, a row of thornbushes can both contain livestock and prevent their predation. However, if one bush in a hedgerow is removed, withers, or dies, the containment of the field may be lost. Thus, a hedge is only as strong as its weakest member. As any good landscaper will tell you, this is why yard maintenance is so important.

Martially speaking, a hedge is composed of individual shields—of individual shield-warriors or *randwiggendra*. Alone, a one-man wall cannot protect what is behind it, nor effectively repel invaders. But linked together in a shield-wall, the *eaxlgesteallan* can both protect their allies behind them and, unlike horticultural hedges, advance upon those enemies before them. However, if one warrior in a *bordhaga* (shield-hedge) is removed, flees, or dies, the containment of the shields may be lost. Thus, a *scildweall* is only as strong as its weakest member. As any *god cyning* (or even a Byrhtnoth) will tell you, this is why *bord* maintenance is so important.

The premier example of a -haga compound in a military context is *wighaga* (war-hedge or battle-hedge) which occurs, naturally enough, in *The Battle of Maldon*:

<sup>13</sup> Brady, "Warriors," 244.

<sup>14</sup> Evans, *Lords of Battle*, 40.

<sup>15</sup> Pollington, *English Warrior*, 130.

Pær ongean gramum gearowe stodon  
 Byrhtnoð mid beornum; he mid bordum het  
 wyrcan þone wihagan, and þæt werod healdan  
 fæste wið feondum.

(100–103)<sup>16</sup>

[There against the fierce ones, ready stood Byrhtnoth with his men; he commanded them to make the battle-hedge with shields, and that host to hold fast against the enemy.]

This *wighaga* is composed, under Byrhtnoth's direction, of men bearing shields (men *mid bordum*), arrayed to form a physical barrier against the oncoming enemy's arrows and spears.<sup>17</sup> *Maldon* shows the importance of the shield-wall formation in a battle plan: under Byrhtnoth's continued exhortations to hold fast, the men are *stede-fæste* (125) and the shield-wall holds, until Byrhtnoth is slain and the sons of Odda flee. The *haga* disperses, the soldiers scatter, and unity—as well as the battle—is lost with the “scyldburh tobrocen” (shield-wall broken) (242). As *Maldon* clearly shows, the integrity of the *wighaga* is essential to a successful battle plan, and when members of the *wighaga* break formation and act as individuals instead of as a unit, disaster ensues.

Like *Maldon*, *Beowulf* also stresses the importance of the *haga* formation, and it further hints at an underlying tension between martial unity and heroic individuation. Following the death of Beowulf, Wiglaf sends a messenger to the useless *haga* who should have—but did not—join Beowulf in his fight against the dragon:

Heht ða þæt heaðoweorc to hagan biodan  
 up ofer ecgclif þær þæt eorlweorod  
 morgenlongne dæg modgiomor sæt  
 bordhæbbende.

(2892–95)<sup>18</sup>

[He then ordered that the battle-deed be announced to the *haga* upon the cliff's edge, where that host of noble warriors, shield-bearing, sat sad-minded all morning long.]

<sup>16</sup> Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, ed., *The Battle of Maldon*, in *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 6 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

<sup>17</sup> See Pollington (*English Warrior* 130; and 182–85), Evans (*Lords of Battle* 37–38), and Brady (“Weapons,” 124–28) for general discussions of shield imagery in *Maldon*.

<sup>18</sup> *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 4th ed., ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

Here, Beowulf's timid *comitatus*—his *haga* in ironic name only—cluster in a useless formation, shield-bearers sitting sadly together far from the battle, a hedge protecting nothing.

As the messenger further berates the troop for their lord's death, he reminds them of their inevitable fate at the hands of the Franks, Frisians, and Swedes, a feud traced back to the revenge Ongentheow suffered at the hands of Hygelac. Despite Ongentheow's desperate attempt to defend his people, "segn Higelaces / freoðowong þone forð ofereodon / syððan Hreðlingas to hagan þrunгон" (the standards of Hygelac overran that place of refuge after the Hrethlings thronged the *haga*) (2958–60). Soon after the *haga* is besieged, Ongentheow is killed, his helm "brecan ofer bordweal" (broken over the shield-wall) (2980). The *haga* in this case probably refers to an established physical fortification rather than a temporary tactical formation; nevertheless, Ongentheow's fatal wound comes with Wulf's breaching of the shield-wall to strike him. This defeat and the subsequent disaster that Beowulf's people face at his death are closely associated with the image of the shield-wall and the danger that ensues when it is weak.

As both *Maldon* and *Beowulf* show, one warrior separated from his shield-companions may accomplish great things (for example, Beowulf is often considered a one-man army), but one warrior cannot, ultimately, prevail against every enemy nor successfully defend his people against every invading force (Beowulf is not a one-man wall). The unity of individual shoulder-warriors within the *wighaga* is essential for group military tactics, and acts of individual heroism may be memorable but may also render the individual vulnerable, both to death and to criticism for *ofermod*.

Not all martial *-haga* references occur in obviously martial texts. In Cynewulf's saintly *Elene*, we find a *bordhaga* employed by the warriors of the Trojan War. Elene coaxes Judas into revealing the location of the True Cross despite its loss two hundred winters ago by citing the Hebrew people's memory of even more distant warfare at Troy:

Ge þæt geare cunnon  
 edre gereccan, hwæt þær eallra wæs  
 on manrime morðorslehtes,  
 dareðlacendra deadra gefeallen  
 under bordhagan.

(648–52)



[You know full well how to relate that quickly, what there was altogether of death-blows among the number of men, of dead spear-bearers felled under the shield-hedge.]

As Elene suggests, if Judas can remember such ancient details, he should also be able to recall the location of the Cross. Her comments regarding the Trojan's *bordhaga* are less clear and can be interpreted two ways: the dead men under the *bordhaga* are either members of the shield-wall or enemies of it. If the first, Elene recalls the fallibility of such a battle tactic; if the latter, then she recalls the very effectiveness of it. However we read Elene's comment, she conflates the Anglo-Saxon *bordhaga* with the ancient Greek *phalanx*, reinforcing the sense of *wighaga* as a military formation with a long and well-known history.

In another of Cynewulf's poems, *Juliana*, we encounter the *cumbolhaga*: the shield-wall of men surrounding the banner, or *cumbol* (sign, standard), of the Lord, emphasizing the martial associations of the *-haga* even in a text dealing with spiritual rather than physical battle (395).<sup>19</sup> Here the Devil confesses to Juliana how he perverts the minds of the weak but is powerless against

ænigne ellenrofne  
 . . . modigne metodes ceman  
 . . . nele feor þonan  
 bugan from beaduwe, ac he bord ongean  
 hefeð hygesnottor, haligne scyld,  
 gæstlic guðreaf, nele gode swican.

(382–87)

[any courageous soldier of the Lord, daring, unwilling to turn away far from battle but (who), wise in mind, lifts up against (the Devil) a shield, holy armor, spiritual defense, unwilling to fail God.]

In other words, the Devil cannot harm a warrior who firmly holds his place within the *wighaga*. Nevertheless, the Devil swears,

ic geomor sceal  
 secan oþerne, ellenleasran,  
 under cumbolhagan, ceman sænran,  
 þe ic onbrydan mæge beorman mine,  
 agælan æt guþe.

(393–97)

<sup>19</sup> *Juliana*, in *The Exeter Book*, ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Record 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

[I, wretched, must seek another, a less courageous one under the banner-hedge, a more cowardly warrior, whom I might incite with my leaven, hinder at battle.]

The Devil (who is never the smartest fellow in any of the saints' lives) would seem to be looking in the wrong place for a weak warrior, since the *cumbolhaga* would likely be the most strongly defended section of the battlefield, the rallying point for loyal retainers. Nevertheless, the imagery in this passage, particularly of the *haligne scyld* (holy armor) of the *metodes cempen* (soldier of the Lord), reinforces our understanding of *-haga* as an element resonating with particular military potency. In addition, the Devil's search for a "weak link" within the *cumbolhaga* reminds us that while the shield-wall formation as a unit is formidable, the enemy who corrupts a single individual in a key tactical element can undermine the whole.

A final *-haga* compound likewise shows the martial struggle between the saintly and the demonic, albeit with a unique twist: in *Guthlac*, the devils employ the hedge formation.

He his modsefan  
wið þam færhagan fæste trymede  
feonda gewinna.

(959–61)<sup>20</sup>

[He (Guthlac) firmly fortified his mind against the terror-hedge of the fiends' attacks.]

Like any warrior before a battle, Guthlac prepares himself against the enemy assault; he readies his mind (*modsefan . . . trymede*) just as Byrhtnoth arranges his warriors (*beornas trymian*, 17) before his own battle. The *færhaga* describes an organized pack of liars "ganging up" on poor Guthlac. In this tale, the devils' strength is derived, uncharacteristically, from their unity in the *færhaga* formation, a twist that makes the saint's withstanding of their attack all the more heroically Christian.

As with the other *-haga* compounds discussed so far—*gemærhaga*, *swinhaga*, *turfhaga*, *wighaga*, *bordhaga*, and *cumbolhaga*—*færhaga* is a bipartite appellation, in which both halves of the compound contribute to its overall meaning. It seems likely then, based on the pattern of meaning established so far, that the most commonly occurring *-haga* compound—*anhaga*—would follow suit. *Anhaga* occurs in seven Old

<sup>20</sup> In *The Exeter Book*, ed. Krapp and Dobbie, ASPR 3.

English works: *Maxims II* (17), *Phoenix* (87), *Wanderer* (1), *Elene* (604), *Andreas* (1349), *Beowulf* (2367), and *Riddle 5* (1). Of these, *Maxims II* offers the least contextual help to the scholar and shows the hazard of hypothesizing meaning *ex nihilo*:

Hafuc sceal on glofe  
 wilde gewunian, wulf sceal on bearowe,  
 <earn> anhaga, efor sceal on holte,  
 toðmægenes trum.

(17–20)<sup>21</sup>

[The hawk shall on the glove wild remain, the wolf shall in the woods,  
 wretched *anhaga*, the boar shall in the thickets, firm of tusk-might.]

The difficulty here lies not only in the simple list format of the maxim, but also in the generally accepted editorial emendation of *earn* (wretched) for the manuscript *earn* (eagle). Given the uncertainty of the manuscript—what, exactly, is *anhaga* modifying?—any particular definition of *anhaga* must arise outside of this text. Could the wolf, separated from his pack, be an *earn anhaga*, the “wretched lone hedge warrior” of the animal kingdom? The parallel adjectival constructions (the wild hawk, the boar firm of tusk) certainly support such a reading.

*Phoenix* and *Wanderer* likewise offer notoriously tricky contexts (further complicated by the appearance of *anhoga* elsewhere in both), yet their narrative complexity has seldom stopped scholars from hypothesizing a meaning for *anhaga* from these poems alone.<sup>22</sup> In *Phoenix*, immediately after this uniquely solitary bird is first introduced by name, it is called *anhaga*:

se is fenix haten.  
 þær se anhaga eard bihealdeþ,  
 deormod drohtað; næfre him deaþ scepeð  
 on þam willwonge, þenden woruld stondeþ.  
 (86–89)<sup>23</sup>

[He is called phoenix. There the *anhaga* keeps his dwelling, his bold-minded condition; death shall never harm him on that pleasant plain, so long as the world stands.]

<sup>21</sup> In *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. Krapp and Dobbie, ASPR 6.

<sup>22</sup> The critical conflation of *-haga* and *-hoga* compounds seems to us misguided, although we recognize the possibility of clerical miswriting. For a discussion of *anhoga/anhaga* confusion and possible semantic overlap, see T. P. Dunning and A. J. Bliss, eds., *The Wanderer* (London: Methuen, 1969), 37–40.

<sup>23</sup> In *The Exeter Book*, ed. Krapp and Dobbie, ASPR 3.

The phoenix, of course, is famous for its solitary nature—there is only ever one of its kind in existence. But he is clearly to be read as a symbol of the resurrected Christ and is described in terms appropriate to a martial chieftain, a leader of his thanes. And it is in this analogy, with its representation of a Christian life as involving community, spiritual striving, and the ultimate defeat of death, that *anhaga* as “solitary shield-bearer” makes sense in this poem. Just as Christ unites all mankind and is among them while still retaining his unique status and superiority, the phoenix is part of, and unites, all bird-kind: when he returns to the plains from his homeland, “fugla cynn / on healfa gehwone heapum þringað” (bird-kind on every side gathers in flocks around him) (335–36). Although the phoenix is clearly part of bird-kind, he is also “sellicran gecynd” (best of his species) (329). Thus the phoenix might be seen as separate from and yet simultaneously a part of bird-kind—an *anhaga* of sorts, separated from his *comitatus* through a sacrifice that is cast in heroic terms: he is “guðfrecan” (battle-brave) (351) and “beaducræftig” (war-crafty) (286), the “leofne leodfruman” (most loved of chiefs) (345) who inspires “Cristes þegnum / beacnað in burgum” (thanes of Christ in the cities) (388–89) to live rightly until “deað . . . / wiga wælgifre” (death, a slaughter-greedy warrior) (485–86) comes. As a figure of Christ, the phoenix is a singular shield-warrior, the premier defense of a Christian community figured as a *wighaga*.

The text of *Wanderer*, a poem so clearly invested in ideas of isolation and separation, famously begins (like *Riddle 5*) by identifying its subject as *anhaga*:

Oft him anhaga are gebideð,  
metudes miltse, þeah þe he modcearig  
geond lagulade longe sceolde  
hreran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ,  
wadan wræclastas.

(1–5)<sup>24</sup>

[Often the *anhaga* awaits favor, the mercy of the creator, though he, sorrowful of mind, long must row with his hands over the waterway, the ice-cold sea, travel the paths of exile.]

For many, the *Wanderer* defines Anglo-Saxon isolation. Yet if the *Wanderer* is alone, he was not always so. Much of the poem, including the extended *ubi sunt* passage, deals with the loss of his lord and his hall-

<sup>24</sup> In *The Exeter Book*, ed. Krapp and Dobbie, ASPR 3.

companions, “leofra geholena” (beloved supporters) (31), those he would have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with in battle. In short, the loss of his *comitatus* or *wighaga* informs the Wanderer’s current plight: he remembers not just lost “seledreamas” (hall-joys) (93) and his “goldwine” (gold-friend, lord) (35), but also his fellow “selesecgas” (hall-warriors) (34) and his membership in the “geoguðe” (troop of young warriors) (35). Thus, he might well be identified as an *anhaga*: not simply a loner or even a lone thinker, but a lone hedge warrior, one whose current situation is defined by his status as a solitary man who was once part of a fighting band.<sup>25</sup>

As noted above, Cynewulf is no stranger to *-haga* compounds, and again in *Elene* we see the isolated Judas confronted by Elene:

Elene maþelode to þam anhagan,  
tireadig cwen, “þe synt tu gearu,  
swa lif swa deað swa þe leofre bið  
to geceosanne.”

(604–7)

[Elene, the glorious queen, spoke to (Judas) the *anhaga*, “Two things are prepared for you, either life or death, as may be dearer to you to choose.”]

Throughout the poem, Judas is referred to as the only one of the Jews who can provide Elene the information she desires. Judas is thus set up in contrast to the “wera mengo” (host of men) (596) from whom he stands out. Thus, when Elene threatens him, he is described as a defenseless *anhaga* who “wæs on þære cwene gewældum” (was in the power of the queen) (610). In *Elene*, Judas faces every threat alone, and so he should not be able to prevail. Yet eventually, converted to faith in Christ and throwing in his lot with “rimtale rices” (the number of [God’s] kingdom) (819), Judas does prevail: as a soldier of Christ and a member of a new *comitatus*, a “hæleð hildedeor” (war-fierce hero) (935), he can face the Devil with Christian heroism.

Perhaps surprisingly, the life of another saint—Andreas—provides one of the best defenses for reading *anhaga* as “lone shield warrior.” See-

<sup>25</sup> Recalling the confusion of *Maxim 17*, the Wanderer is described as *earnne anhagan* (40), which John C. Pope emends to *earnne anhaga* in *Seven Old English Poems* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 29. In his notes, Pope mentions the parallel between this scene and that of Beowulf as he swims home alone after “he has lost his uncle Hygelac and all his former comrades in battle” (81). Like Pope, we acknowledge the possible scribal confusion between *anhaga* and *anhoga* and see no need to complicate matters by enforcing a “connection with the religious recluse.” However, in the interest of textual fidelity, we are only cataloguing clear manuscript cases of *anhaga* in the present essay.

ing Christ's cross upon Andreas's face in battle, Hell's warriors are terrified, break rank, and run away (1334–41). In response to his father's chastisement at this military failure, the son of Satan replies:

Ne magan we him lungre lað ætfæstan,  
 swilt þurh searwe. Ga þe sylfa to!  
 Pær þu gegninga guðe findest,  
 frecne feohtan, gif ðu furður dearst  
 to þam anhagan aldre geneðan.

(1347–51)

[Suddenly, we are unable to inflict injury upon him or death by treachery. Go yourself! There you will certainly find battle, perilous strife, if you dare further venture life against that *anhaga*.]

As the devils and the narrator describe him, Andreas is a decidedly martial saint, called in surrounding passages “guðfrecan” (warrior) (1330), “þrohheardne þegn” (thane strong under afflictions) (1391), “leoflic cempa” (cherished champion) (1446), and “wigendra hleo” (shelter of soldiers) (1450). In short, Andreas is a “warrior of Christ”<sup>26</sup> whom “god forstod / staðulfæst steorend, þurh his strangan miht” (God, the steadfast steersman, protected through his strong might) (1335–36). As in any sound *comitatus*, the lord supports his thane, and the thane supports his lord; God supports Guthlac, and Guthlac supports God. In his solitary fight against the “hæðenra hloð” (troop of heathens) (1389), Andreas becomes a willing *anhaga* for God, standing alone against the heathens, but still identified in terms of a larger celestial fighting force.

Finally, the ultimate Anglo-Saxon warrior, Beowulf, is described as an *anhaga* as he returns home after Hygelac's death in battle: “Oferswam ða sioleða bigong sunu Ecgðeowes, / earm anhaga eft to leodum” (Then the son of Ecgtheow swam across the sea way, wretched *anhaga*, back to the people) (2367–68). Like the Wanderer, Beowulf is adrift, separated from his lord and former shield-companions. Also like the Wanderer, Beowulf is named *anhaga* not simply because he is alone but because of what he once was: a member of a now-broken fighting unit. Beowulf, as a truly exceptional hero, survives his isolation (he success-

<sup>26</sup> This term is Rolf H. Bremmer's, in “Changing Perspectives on a Saint's Life: *Juliana*,” in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, ed. Henk Aertsen and Rolf H. Bremmer (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Press, 1995): 201–16. Bremmer uses the term to describe Judith and similar saints: “Just as the hero tales relate the adventures of an outstanding warrior of a tribe in a crucial state of existence, so too saints' lives celebrate the speeches and deeds, and especially the perseverance of the ‘warriors of Christ’, as members of the young ‘tribe’ of the faithful” (207).

fully rejoins the remainder of his people), but the poet's recollection of this incident brings his current situation—his impending fight against the dragon—into stark relief. This seafaring digression follows directly upon the creation of his own "eallirene . . . / wigbord" (warboard all of iron) (2338–39)—the singular iron shield that will soon be his solitary defense against the dragon, an enemy he chooses to face without the support of his present *comitatus*. The poet inserts the *anhaga* flashback at the narrative point during which Beowulf is preparing to separate himself from his "heorðgeneatum" (hearth-companions) (2418), to step away from the ranks of his *comitatus* and face the foe alone. Fittingly, he now recalls his past exploits as a lone shield warrior. Yet as doughty as Beowulf may still be, in this solitary encounter he will die. While a warrior without the support of loyal shield-companions may fail or prevail, an *anhaga* who faces battle is always remarkable in some way, and any victory especially noteworthy. *Anhaga* in general seems to denote a warrior apart from his accustomed *comitatus*, and that can be a singularly stressful, wretched experience in Anglo-Saxon culture, as the Wanderer attests. To be *anhaga* is to occupy a liminal, uncharacteristic space.

As this survey reveals, *-haga* compounds can carry both horticultural and martial connotations. The resultant linguistic play between the martial and the domestic meanings of *haga* finds no better expression than in the intentionally enigmatic *Exeter Riddle 5*, which opens, much like the *Wanderer*, with an invocation of the compound *anhaga*:

Ic eom anhaga iserne wund,  
bille gebennad, beadoweorca sæd,  
ecgum werig.

(1–3)<sup>27</sup>

[I am *anhaga*, wounded by iron, beaten by blade, sated with battle-work, wearied by swords.]

*Riddle 5* has traditionally been solved as "shield" or even "chopping block," although William Sayers has more recently proposed that "whetstone" is a likely solution.<sup>28</sup> As Sayers notes, the solution's "chopping block" and "whetstone" both rely on a riddling movement from an obvious (even hypertrophic) martial context to a less obvious domestic context, whether the kitchen or the smithy.<sup>29</sup> In other words, having

<sup>27</sup> In *The Exeter Book*, ed. Krapp and Dobbie, ASPR 3.

<sup>28</sup> Sayers, "Exeter Book Riddle No. 5: Whetstone?" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 97 (1996): 387–92.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 387–88.

been initially misled by the opening *anhaga* salvo, the reader of *Riddle 5* must navigate out of the parodic bombardment of battlefield clichés in order to successfully solve the riddle. A reading of *anhaga* as a “lone hedge warrior” supplements this reading by firmly connecting the solitary *anhaga* to the warrior’s ubiquitous shield.<sup>30</sup> Further, if we keep in mind both the agricultural and the martial compounds surveyed above, we also see how the deceptively martial opening line, “Ic eom anhaga,” supports a solution located within a domestic sphere. That is, although *anhaga* was primarily understood as “lone hedge warrior” (thus suggesting a martial context), the medieval reader suspicious of the martial clichés in the riddle would have then understood *an-haga* as “one-hedge,” a noun as domestic as the yard itself. The solution to *Riddle 5* thus returns to its opening riddle within a riddle, the curious compound *anhaga*, for affirmation.

Like the American G.I., named for his “general issue” or “government issue” uniform and equipment, or like the Greek *hoplite*, who takes his name from the *hoplon*, his ever-present shield, the Anglo-Saxon warrior takes his identity in part from his place in the *wighaga*, by his role as one essential but uniform member of the battle hedge: a hedge warrior. Separated from his *eaxlgesteallan*, the Anglo-Saxon warrior is especially beleaguered, any subsequent victory singularly remarkable.

To be a lone hedge warrior is thus to be truly alone: *anhaga*.<sup>31</sup>

Jeff Massey, Molloy College

Karma DeGruy, University of South Alabama

<sup>30</sup> Sayers’s difficulty in reconciling *anhaga* (which he takes to mean “solitary one”) with the “ubiquitous shield” of the Anglo-Saxon warrior is eased if *anhaga* is understood as a lone hedge warrior; that is, one man = one shield.

<sup>31</sup> We would like to thank James H. Morey and J. R. Hall for their encouragement and advice during the initial preparation of this article.



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.