Homework 1: Treasure Hoards

In Beowulf, the act of gift-giving is repeatedly employed to express one’s appreciation of valiant efforts, or to signify the importance of a relationship between peoples of power. One such example of this is when Wealhtheow bestows upon Beowulf a suit of armor, and a torque that is compared to the one worn by Freya of Germanic mythology (and therefore, obviously of great beauty.) She entreats him, “I wish you a lifetime’s luck and blessings / to enjoy this treasure. Treat my sons / with tender care, be strong and kind” (1225-1227). As such, the torque and armor serve not only as identifiers of Beowulf’s great strength and prestige, but also to remind him of the important bond he has formed with Wealhtheow and her children. The appearance of such treasures within a horde suggest the extreme importance of combat and valor to the society that aimed to preserve them. In Beowulf, while death’s eventual presence is ultimate and undeniable, one can surpass it through long-lasting fame, or a good name. As such, the preservation of treasures denoting one’s good standing, or heroic feats, would be very important to such a society.