

Student Essay on Beowulf and Mead Hall

Beowulf and Mead Hall by Gareth Hinds

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Contents

Student Essay on Beowulf and Mead Hall.....	1
Contents.....	2
Essay.....	3

Essay

The mead hall is symbolic of the strength of a tribe: the more powerful the tribe, the more they conquer, the more wealth they obtain through those conquests and the greater the mead hall they are able to build. The poem describes mead halls as great buildings, in which a king is best served during times of peace building a great mead hall. Hrothgar built it a great mead hall as the result of the successful wars and the building of a great army (1.64-69). The mead hall is symbolic of the virility, powerfulness and material wealth of a tribe.

The mead halls function as a place of government and commerce. The mead hall has significant importance because of the activities that take place at the mead hall - one of them being the handling of military orders - a place where armies gather (12.2868). In addition to military order, it is a place of commerce, where wealth and gifts are distributed (11.2634). The mead halls because of their government and commerce functions could have been the first building to act like "city halls" in our modern age.

Finally the mead hall is significant to the tribe because serves as the central communication and cultural center. It is where stories are read and it is a central gathering place for the tribe (9.2186). Looking at the big picture, the monster was creating fear at the mead hall - so great it was wrecking the symbolic powerfulness, functions and culture of the tribe. Enough so that the entire first half of Beowulf is devoted to this supernatural hero saving the mead hall - the most dramatic way the poet can describe the importance of the mead halls.