“Literary Terms and Definitions”

Dr. L. Kip Wheeler (Year)

Literary Terms and Definitions

**COMITATUS**: (Latin: "companionship" or "band"): The term describes the tribal structure of the Anglo-Saxons and other Germanic tribes in which groups of men would swear fealty to a *hlaford* (lord) in exchange for food, mead, and *heriot*, the loan of fine armor and weaponry. The men who swore such an oath were called *thegns* (roughly akin to modern Scottish "thane"), and they vowed to fight for their lord in battle. It was considered a shameful disaster to outlive one's own lord. The *comitatus* was the functional military and government unit of early Anglo-Saxon society. The term was first coined by the classical historian Tacitus when he described the Germanic tribes north of Rome.

**THEGN**: A warrior who has sworn his loyalty to a lord in Anglo-Saxon society. In return for a gift of weaponry and provisions of food and drink at the mead-hall, the *thegn* vows to fight for his lord and die in his service. He also takes up the task of avenging his lord's death if that lord (*hlaford*) should die. Compare with Modern English *thane*. See Anglo-Saxon, *hlaford*, and *heriot*.

**HLAFORD** (Anglo-Saxon *hlaf+ord*, "loaf-leader" or "loaf-giver," or possibly from *hlaf-weenard*, "loaf-guardian," becomes Mod. English *lord*): An Anglo-Saxon warrior chieftain who was served by a number of loyal warriors called *thegns*. His wife, called the *hlafdig* ("loaf-kneader," becomes, Modern English *lady*) or the *cwen* (becomes modern English *queen*), may have been responsible for overseeing communal provisions. In the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, Hrothgar is the *hlaford* of Heorot, and Weoltheow is the *hlafdig*. See *hlafdig*, Anglo-Saxon, *thegn*, and *heriot*. 

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