The implications of such an extraordinary reputation in early Norse texts have unfortunately remained unexplored in Beowulf studies. Hrólf’s character and reputation have largely been neglected and the critical focus has been on two lines from Saxo’s Latin version of the Bjarkamál, which are the only lines in all of Scandinavian literature which can possibly be cited in support of the hypothesis that Beowulf presents Hrœulf as a man who will betray his uncle and/or cousin and seize the throne. What little support they do give to this hypothesis is the product of multiple levels of interpretation. We learn from Saxo’s Latin rendering of the poem that Rolvo,

\[ \text{. . . natum Bøki Røricum stravit avari} \]
implicuitque virum leto virtute carentem.

\[ \text{. . . felled Rørik, son of Bøk the miser, he wrapped in death the man who lacked all} \]
\[ \text{prowess. (ii.7.13)} \]

This Røricus, we are told, hoarded treasure and begrudged to distribute rings until he is faced with attack by Rolvo’s fleet, to which he responds by ordering his men to open his chests of gold and spread it before his gates, hoping to bribe Rolvo into calling off his attack and sailing away. But Rolvo attacks, slays Røricus, and then proceeds to distribute all the wealth he seizes. Gregor Sarrazin argued that the phrase *natum Bøki . . . avari* ‘the son of the avaricious Baug’ is the result of Saxo’s misunderstanding of an epithet *hnöggvanbaugi*, and suggested that we ought to read ‘the ring-greedy Hrærek’ in this passage. He apparently assumed that the second element of the compound, –*baugi*, ‘ring,’ was no longer understood and the epithet was taken as a patronymic. More significantly, Sarrazin also argued that in this incident we see a reference to Hrœulf’s attack against his cousin Hreðric and his usurpation of the throne, an episode to which he believed the text of Beowulf alludes.¹

Sarrazin’s interpretation of these lines was widely accepted in the early twentieth century due to the advocacy of this reading by the Danish folklorist and historiographer Axel Olrik and the influential Beowulf scholars Frederick Klaeber, R. W. Chambers and W. W. Lawrence.² Not content with Sarrazin’s claim that one epithet associated with a Hrærekr lies beneath the text, Olrik argued that another Hrærekr-epithet, *slöngvanbaugi* ‘ring slinger,’ belongs to this Rœricus as well, because he commands his officials to strew his gold before his gates.³ Through this argument he sought to neutralize the problem of the two contradictory epithets, whose opposed meanings strongly imply either the presence of two Hræreks, or of two independent traditions about Hrærekr. Olrik also rejected everything that other texts reported about a Hrærekr, including the testimony of multiple texts that Hrölf, after a few short hours in which Hjörvarðr was king, is succeeded on the throne by a Hrærekr who is his kinsman. He dismisses these other stories about Hræreks by rejecting the pedigrees connected to these figures, declaring that “All these genealogies are impossible.”⁴ Even while denigrating the clear information about Hrærekr provided by these other texts he accepts the equation between Hreðric and the Rœricus in Saxo’s Bjarkamál, a figure whose genealogy he and Sarrazin simply negate, leaving a blank slate for their reading.
1 Sarrazin, “Rolf Krake.”
2 Klaeber, “Hrothulf”; Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, pp. 73-74; Chambers, *Beowulf*, p. 26; although Lawrence, *Beowulf and Epic Tradition*, p. 309 n1 expresses some reservations about Olrik’s reconstruction of the story of the Danish royal house, he essentially agrees with the other scholars about their implications for our understanding of *Beowulf*. See pp. 71-79. More recently, see Fisher and Davidson, *Saxo Grammaticus*, vol. 2, p. 48 n64, who observe that “Bøki avari could be an attempt to translate hnøggvanbaugi into Latin, if Saxo took the genitive form of baugr (ring) as a proper name.”
4 Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, p. 69.