

The measure of spacing

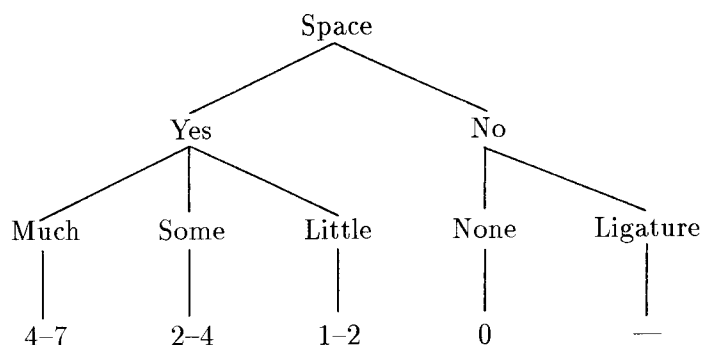
Because transcription of spacings between letter-strings is the distinctive element of this text, a careful account of the principles used in interpreting the manuscript should make the text easier to understand and use, harder to misunderstand and misuse.

First, any transcription cannot enhance the original text. On the contrary, it abstracts in the act of copying, rendering the new text to some extent less exact.

This effect will be the right one if it leads to further understanding of the text and does not lead to misunderstanding. Representing the spacing variants with integer numerals 0–7, the system adopted in the original version of this text, seems to be as good as any might be: a finer scale would yield many more forced choices where the differences are not that clear, while a coarser scale would conflate many of the differences that are clear.

Initially the manuscript text was transcribed from beginning to end with a gap left at every point in the sequence of letters where spacing was left in the manuscript. A gap was also left between words, between prefix and root morphemes, and between root morphemes within words. The text was also marked for metrical line boundaries and the constituent halfline boundaries. Subsequently, the spacings in the manuscript at these gaps and boundaries were transcribed in numeral notation—0 for no-space, 1–7 for some space (and 9 for end of manuscript line and 8 for spacing that cannot be measured or is in doubt).

The transcription of the spacings is just that—a transcription. The interpretation of the new text is a different matter altogether, which seems to be analogous to interpretation of phonological data. In this analogy, the numeral notation 0–7 corresponds to broad phonetic transcription with a few diacritics to refine it just a bit. There remains the crucial interpretation on the model of phonemic analysis—those units defined by functional contrasts. For the *Beowulf* text (and for the text of Ælfric’s *Grammar* cited earlier), the “-emics” of the spacings seem to be something like that shown in the diagram below. The overlap in this general schema (1–2, 2–4, 4–7) will usually not occur within an immediate context; and within any range, particularly the 4–7 range, distinctions may still occur.



If the “-etic” transcription is interpreted in “-emic” terms (and if indeterminate ⁹ and ⁸ are replaced by / and ?), the general consistency of the spacing variations becomes clear. For example:

- 0371 Hrōð¹-gār⁵ ma²þe¹lode⁶ helm³ scyl¹dinga /
 0456 Hrōð⁴-gār⁵ ma¹þelode⁶ helm³ scyl²dinga /
 1321 Hrōð³-gār⁵ maþelode⁶ helm³ scyldinga /
 1481 hond²-ge[?]-sellum⁴ gif¹ mec³ hild³ nime. /
 0447 ()deore*drēore⁴ fāhne⁵ gif² mec / dēað³ nimeð. ⁷
 1491 dóm³ ge¹-wyr¹ce / oþðe⁵ mec³ dēað⁴ nimeð. ⁶
 0441 dryhtnes⁴ dōme⁶ sē¹ þe⁵ hine / dēað⁴ nimeð. ⁶
 0706 þ¹ hīe³ ne¹ mōste⁵ þā¹ metod / nolde. ⁶
 0967 ic / hine⁴ ne² mihte⁵ þā¹ metod⁴ nolde ⁶
 1154 scēotend³ scyl/dinga⁴ tō⁰ scypon³ fere²don⁴
 1158 driht-/lice⁴ wif⁵ tō⁰ denum³ feredon⁵
 0029 swāse³ ge⁰-sīþas / Swā² hē³ selfa⁴ bæd⁴
 2040 swāse⁴ ge⁰-sīðas⁴ ond³ hyra² sylf/ra⁴ feorh³

(1) Scale of Measure. The contextual variations and the graphic principles rule out simple mechanical means of measuring spacing. It is true that there are long stretches of manuscript copy, in the hands of both scribes, in which a millimeter scale will yield approximately the notation that appears in this text. Most of the copy produced by S2, in fact, has measures 2 through 7 that corresponds broadly to millimeter measures 2 through 7; about 1½ mm counts as 1, and about 1 mm—the distance separating letters in normal juxtaposition—counts as 0.

There are many places in the copy produced by S1, on the other hand, where a millimeter scale does not even approximate the notation given here. Change in size of spacing relative to a fixed scale can be observed in the copying of a single verse line.

1210 ge-hwearf þā in francna fæþm feorh cyninges

Between *franc-* and *-na*—in the middle of a word in the middle of a halfline—the scribe changed the size of both letters and spacings. A few lines later he reverted to the former size for both. Between verses 1422 and 1423, at a change from one page to the next (recto and verso of the same leaf), is another conspicuous change in relative size of letters and spacings. Or the page containing lines 805–827 has generally more than usual distance between non-spaced letters, making assessment of minimal spacings very difficult.

Just ahead of a sectional division the writing of the last few words may be stretched out (as in line 114).

At any point in the text, therefore, measure of any given spacing is assessed on a scale relative to the size of letters and spacings in the immediate context.

(2) Scribal Corrections. Additions or other changes made after a string of letters has been copied often affect the spacing between consecutive morphs. In line 90, a ζ “was squeezed in” later, as Malone notes, to change *sæde* to *sægde*. Before and after the ζ was added there was no spacing within the word. In 1285 the last stroke of an *m* has been erased to make the first *n* in *bunden* after the word had been written; the resultant gap is not counted as spacing in this text. (It should be noted, however, that instances of this kind of change are easily overlooked in working from printed facsimile, hence omitted in the transcription.) In 1951 an *n* apparently has been added by the same scribal hand to fill a 3-space in *syððan well*. Because this position can only have been a word boundary, yet because the source of the initial error can only be conjectured, the word boundary is marked with 8-spacing, which is to say, indeterminate. In 1944 (on same manuscript page) a later addition of *s* in *on-hōhsnod[e]* fills a small space originally left between *h* and *n*; in the transcription no notation of the original spacing is given.

There are a few instances where spacing characteristics may point to a change in the initial copy, ordinarily the result of adding a letter or two. In 1604 the final *n* of *wine-drihten* seems to have been added after the next word was begun, leaving 1-spacing at the end of verse line instead of the normal large measure (4- or 5-spacing, in this context); it may be noted, further, that all other instances of *en* on the same page (e.g., 1598 *pēoden*) are ligatured, with the tongue of the *e* rising, whereas it is a flatly horizontal stroke in this instance. The *n* is differently shaped, as well. The erratic spacing is found in context of aberrant letter shaping. In this instance, the resultant spacing is recorded, for lack of a secure principle for interpreting the evidence.

Another occurs in 2981, where *s* can be inferred to be a later addition in *folces hyrde*. Lack of distinct spacing between words with morphological and syllable structure like these is contrary to S2’s normal copy, and the resultant string of eleven letters without spacing is altogether unlike S2’s writing patterns.

In 1882 *g* seems on grounds of graphotactic patterns to have been added in *hrēmig*, and in 1883 *d* seems to have been added to produce *aged* (emended to *āgend*)—both in the same line of copying. The notation in both instances shows the resulting 1-space.

With publication of the new *Electronic Beowulf* more detailed work can be done in detecting and recording scribal corrections. In the meantime, their imperfect recording here should be allowed for, but it can have only small effect on the general utility of the present text.

(3) Pointing. The single point is chiefly a mark of separation, presumably, as it is elsewhere employed in Anglo-Saxon writing.

In *Beowulf* it is not a mark to separate sentences, though. It does occur between sentences, but it also occurs between parts of sentences (not necessarily at “obvious” clause-boundaries), and it occurs at only a few of the sentences boundaries.

In most instances, it occurs at a half-line juncture, i.e., at the end of an *a*-verse or a *b*-verse. Exceptions are few, most are close to verse-ends, and probably

are to be attributed to intentional pointing absent-mindedly misplaced, as at 279*a* *hū hē frōd. 7 gōd*, or at 553*b* *mē tō grunde . tēah*, or arbitrarily placed after the last word on the page in 1159*a* *læddon. tō lēodum* (but probably not misplaced in 1585*b* *tō ðæs. þe hē on ræste geseah*).

Pairs of points enclose (and identify) non-phonological text—the roman numerals for most of the fitt numbering, numeral notation such as xv^{na} (207) or runic notation (520, 913, 1702).

The points are transcribed as a full stop (a period), whether written on the ruled line or (as S1's writing usually has it) raised to mid-level of letters without ascenders. In this edition, a single point is transcribed to follow the last letter preceding it, and prior to the spacing notation.

Except in very few instances, the pointing was transcribed on the authority of Malone. He gives only counts of points on any manuscript page (not a full list of their specific locations), but generally his reports of the pointing are clear. If Malone is doubtful about the presence of a point, even when one is listed by Zupitza, it has been omitted in the present text; two exceptions are those at the ends of lines 1029 and 1904. (I have chosen to follow these sources in any instance in which Altman's diplomatic e-text differs, because Malone and Zupitza collated their copy with the MS, while Altman's edition is based on the facsimile.)

The original pointing of the manuscript text is especially difficult to determine with accuracy approaching that of the alphabetic text, and modification of the present text in this respect will depend on careful use of the electronic *Beowulf*-text when it becomes available. Some of the pointing no doubt has been lost at the right margin on the recto of many folios, the result of damage to the parchment.

In any case, the pointing may well be a deliberate part of the manuscript text. Most points were placed where they occur as part of the initial process of committing the text to parchment: they were usually centered in spacings of predictable widths; they are not consistently placed to mark sentence ends; and they do not occur often enough to be simply line-end markers, or halfline markers (as in the "Junius" manuscript of the "Caedmonian" poems). In several instances the scribes appear to have taken the trouble to be sure a point was not obscured or left out. A prime example is the point terminating line 451. If the line ending with *sorgi-* had been extended as far to the right as were the second and fourth lines following it, the last two letters could have been written on the same line; the point would then have had to be placed close to the final *n*, and would have only slightly exceeded the margin. Instead, the final word *sorgian* is divided at the end of the manuscript line, with only the last two letters carried over to the beginning of the next, followed by a point within a very wide space. Just as one-syllable *brēost* two lines later is an undividable string of letters, by scribal norms for this text, so apparently the point is neither expendable nor to be obscured. Similar instances of a point following the last syllable of a word that has been broken by a line end occurs in lines 317, 1227, and 1715*a*.

(4) Letter Shapes and Spacing. This topic has given rise to considerable confusion. G. Storms, for example (*ES*, 52 (1971), 157–159), challenged an attempt

to analyze the spacing in the *Beowulf* text: "But where do Anglo-Saxon letters begin or end?" Many lack a "clear vertical downstroke," such as *x o c e þ ð b d*. Others have "flourishes and curves" to begin and end them. A particularly harsh review of *Suprasegmentals, Meter, and the Manuscript of Beowulf* by C. J. E. Ball went further to claim that the notation of spacing is inaccurate (and the analysis based on it of no value, therefore) "because the author consistently ignores the hair-line and run-off strokes of final *e*, *l* and *r*" (*RES*, 21 (1970), 476). He then reports his measures of spacings between the words in the nine recurrences of *Beowulf mapelode bearn Ecgþeowes*, noting that only one-third of the lines have greater spacing at the halfline boundary than elsewhere (478), contrary to the generalization that halflines are separated by relatively wide spacing.

Confusion and controversy of this kind arise from different (and some unsound) notions of what should be measured. If one is just taking dimensions to see whether a pattern will emerge, any measure is as good as any other so long as it is taken (and reported) accurately. On the other hand, if one is taking dimensions in an attempt to understand a pattern, all the measures need to represent relations among elements in the writing that are of the same order. What happens if one ignores the run-off stroke—the tongue—of the final *e* at the halfline boundary in the recurrent verse-line *Beowulf mapelode bearn Ecgþeowes*? The writing of the text then has the pattern shown in the following table.

529	.	/	1	4	6	2	1	/
631		/	0	1	5	3	2	. 5
957	.	7	0	/	5	2	2	5
1383	Fitt		0	6	6	2	1	4
1473	Fitt		0	5	6	2	1	/
1651	Fitt		0	4	7	4	2	/
1817	Fitt		?	5	5	3	2	3
1999	.	/	2	4	4	4	3	/
2425	.	7	2	3	3	/	2	5

The question to resolve is whether significant measurement of the horizontal distance is to begin from the ending of the tongue of *e* to the first vertically aligned marking of the next letter, or is the measurement to begin from the "body" of the final *e*?

My decision to use the latter method rests squarely on the following judgment. Length of tongue of *e* (or of *æ*) is regarded as a function of the spacing between letter strings, not the other way around. One can think of the space where the tongue is extended as being undefined, in the sense it hasn't been closed at the time the tongue is drawn. But only in that sense. Undefined does not mean space is not being left. The measure of the spacing will be whatever it would have been if some other letter had preceded it. (How else to explain also the prefix *ge-* in *getruweden* 1095*a* occurring at the end of a line of copy with an unusually extended

tongue, stretched to fill a width equal to that of the two lines preceding?) Simply, the tongue of the *e* would not be extended at the halflin boundary unless there was (to be) a wide spacing between the halflines. The same holds true for the final stroke of *e* at any other place spacing is (to be) left, whether the spacing is wide or narrow. Placement of points is similar.

The run-off strokes of “final” *l* and *r* also need to be considered in relational terms rather than as if they were somehow autonomous. The notion of “final” *e*, *l*, and *r*, it will be remembered, is not defined by the concept of word in the graphotactics of this text; “final” is the last letter before a prototypical division by spacing of letter-strings whether representing words, morphemes, or syllables.

The evidence is everywhere—clearest, though, in the first scribe’s copy. Fig. 3 reproduces the lower one-third of one page as illustration; Fig. 4 shows the same text transcribed with graphotactic notation. Now, if *gear-das* (MS. line 16) could be said not to be divided because of the run-off stroke of the *r*, one asks first why similar run-offs do not occur within words in the text following until *gear-dum* (MS. line 20). Even shapes of the word-final *r*’s (*wuldor*, *weder*, *winter*) aren’t much different. Then if one follows the manuscript text to see where spacings occur after *l*’s, the pattern of relations is similar (see especially *fol-dan*, MS. line 19). Then sort the run-off strokes of *f*. And finally sort the places at which spacing occurs at syllable boundaries following any other letter. The pattern of spacing is consistent for all instances when run-offs are seen as extensions into a planned space and not as the causes of right-displacement of a following letter.

Ultimately, the correct interpretation of the tongue of *e* and *æ*, the run-offs from *r* and *l* (and one should add *f*, see MS. line 13 of Fig. 3, for example), or any other variant letter shapes in relation to spacing must be made in terms of the text of which they are parts. They can be regarded in the same way, say, as morphophonemic alternates, which are distinguished by contexts but do not distinguish meanings. In the matter of these letter shapes, as in the matter of the spacing in general, pattern will appear, and will be meaningful, if the variants are correlated with larger linguistic or metrical patterns. Otherwise they are at best absolute but inert, at worst impediments to textual analysis.

hringed stefnan
 holm storme weol þon wið winde wintor
 ype be leac is gebinde oððæt oþer com
 gear nigeras swā nu sūt dēð þā ðe
 syn gales sele be witað wuldor torh
 tan weder dā wæs winter sca cen
 fæder fol dan bearm fundode wrecca
 gist of gear dum hē tō gyn-wræce
 swiðor þoht þon tō sālde

FIG. 3. British Library MS Cot. Vit. A.xv, fol. 154r, ll. 13–20.

1130 þeah² þe⁵ ()he*ne¹ meah⁹te⁵ on¹ mere⁵ drifan⁵
 1131 hringed⁻³-stef¹nan⁹ holm² storme⁵ wēol⁴
 1132 won² wið³ win¹de⁵ winter⁹ ype³ be⁻¹-lēac⁵
 1133 is⁻²-ge⁻²-binde⁴ op⁰ ðæt³ oþer³ com⁹
 1134 gear³ in¹ gear²das⁵ swā² nū² gyt⁴ dēð⁴
 1135 þā¹ ðe⁹ syn¹gāles⁵ sēle³ be⁻²-witiað⁵
 1136 wuldor⁻³-torh⁹tan³ weder⁵ ðā¹ wæs⁴ winter⁴ sca¹cen³
 1137 fæger⁹ fol¹dan⁴ bearm⁴ fundode⁴ wrecca⁴
 1138 gist⁹ of³ gear²dum⁶ hē⁰ tō³ gyn⁻³-wræce⁴
 1139 swiðor⁹ þoht¹e⁶ þon=² tō² sālde⁻²-lāde⁶

FIG. 4. Text shown in FIG. 3 edited with graphotactic information.